

Bedstraw. In former times, it was customary on great occasions to strew flowers and sweet herbs on beds, and about the floors of both sitting and sleeping apartments, and some of these plants being fragrant were used for that purpose. The word strew was also spelt strow, or straw, and the bed-straw or herb for strewing beds thus gained its name.

Fumitory is so called from *fumus*, smoke, on account of its unpleasant smell.

The Common Broom is useful for the winter food of sheep, and for thatching ricks and cottages. Brooms were probably first made of this plant, and so took their name from it. There is a tradition that the family of Plantagenet derived its name from the Broom. It is said that Fulk, the first Earl of Anjou, who bore the name of Plantagenet, being stung with remorse for some wicked action, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as an atonement, and being there soundly scourged with Broom twigs, which grew plentifully on the spot, he ever after took the name of *Planta-gênet*, or Broom Plant, (*gênet* being the French term for Broom) which was retained by his noble posterity.

Poppies have an unwholesome scent, for they partake enough of the opiate qualities of their tribe to occasion a very uncomfortable sensation in the head if smelt too long.

Black Bryony has leaves like those of a *Convolvulus*. True Bryony has leaves in the shape of the Vine and are somewhat rough.

Teasel heads are extensively used in the manufacture of woollen cloths, for the purpose of raising the nap upon them. They are fixed round a large broad wheel, which is made to turn round, and the cloth is held against them, so that these strong hooked sheaths or scales comb and scratch up the surface. That which is called the Fuller's Teasel is cultivated in the West of England for this purpose, but is not so commonly found wild as the two other British species which are more handsome, but having straight instead of hooked awns cannot be turned to any account.

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## OF BIRDS AND BIRDS' NESTS.

At each return of spring there comes to the bird-lover the time of keenest interest. There is then so much mystery among the feathered tribes, so much coming and going among the hedgerows, so many things to be discovered in the gardens and woods. Of the birds' nests which are most frequently met with in gardens, I think that of the Chaffinch is the most beautiful. There is, in an orchard I know of, a gnarled and lichen-covered apple tree, upon a bough of which a Chaffinch has built a wonderful structure of moss and lichen, till it looks almost like a part of the tree itself. It is lined with the softest feathers and is filled with a gaping brood of young birds. In the lower branch of a great silver fir, I discovered one day a Bullfinch's nest. The little bird was sitting patiently there, being gently swayed in the breeze which was moving the boughs. She did not stir when she saw me, but watched with anxiety every movement of the unwelcome intruder with her little bright black eyes. Her nest is not one of the prettiest, the materials being coarse, generally it is composed of fine twigs or roots; no delicate moss or feathers are found in this nest; it is lined with root fibres. The Bullfinch, although such a bright and elegant little fellow, is by no means a welcome sight to the gardener or fruit-grower, for he has a dangerous taste for fruit-buds, and he and his fellows work havoc in the orchards. This spring they have been a great plague; as many as sixteen were seen at one time in an orchard at their destructive work of eating the heart out of every fruit-bud on the apple trees. Passing under a trellis archway the other day, a little bird darted out and revealed to me her nest placed on the flat ledge of the arch. It was the nest of a Spotted Flycatcher. I moved away to a little distance to see whether the bird would go back again, but though I stayed for sometime, she would not go back, but kept flying from bush to bush and circling round the archway, evidently in a state of great uneasiness, till at last I took pity on her distress and walked on.

The Flycatcher is not a bird of striking appearance, but its ways are most interesting to watch. On any summer day you may observe it perched on a low bough or railing, making lightening



darts every now and then at some invisible insect, returning each time to its post of observation. It is not in the least disturbed in this work by an on-looker.

Leaving the garden and its fascinating nests, let us examine for a time yonder reed-fringed lake from which one hears the cry of numerous wild-fowl. On approaching the margin, a Moorhen starts up from the rushes and with a great deal of noise and splashing flies across the lake. If the spot from which she rose is inspected, in all probability no nest will be discovered, for these birds are cunning and directly danger is perceived glide noiselessly away from the nest, in and out among the rushes, rising and flying off some yards away from the spot they wish to conceal. A little search, however, will soon reveal it, for it is not hidden with any great skill. The nests I have observed are built among a group of rushes, and consist of flags and dried reeds. The number of eggs in a nest is from eight to ten; the bird has two and even three broods in a year.

There is a bird which at first sight may be taken for a Moorhen, but a closer inspection reveals a large white spot above the bill, which proclaims it to be a Coot. The nest of this bird is larger than that of the Moorhen, but the materials are generally similar.

Here I caught sight one day of a Wild Duck and her family of twelve swimming leisurely about. For sometime I watched them, and then, making a little noise, away flew the duck, leaving her ducklings to shift for themselves, which they very promptly did, disappearing as they did among the reeds and under the bank.

Over by that island is a Swan's nest. The bird is very visible, sitting there on the enormous pile which it raises in the water for its nest. Her mate is swimming up and down in front of her. Very stately and dignified he looks. He is mounting guard, and a good sentinel he is too; if any one approaches too near the nest he will quickly warn them off with a loud hiss and much flapping of his wings.

There is yet another favourite haunt to which I should like to introduce my readers; it is a low hill, pleasantly varied with wood and moorland. Walking along a grassy side in the wood one day, I was startled by a bird rising with a tremendous flapping just behind me; I turned round just in time to see a hen Capercaillie making off with trailing wings through the grass, without the slightest sound. The nest, in which were two eggs, was almost

under my feet, among some tall grass that arched over it. The hen Capercaillie is much smaller than the male, a magnificent bird, well deserving his appellation of "Cock of the Woods." Emerging from the wood on to the open moorland, the cry of the Red Grouse is heard. The words "go back, go back," repeated sharply and quickly, seem to me to represent the cry exactly.

In the still air the cry of the Curlew sounds quite distinct, although the birds may be seen wheeling over the hill-top a mile away. I have had the good fortune to get close to one of these birds, and had a good view of his long curved bill, which is so useful to him in digging for his food on the muddy sea-shore or in the marshes.

I think we do not sufficiently give thanks for these feathered friends of ours, nor realize what Nature would be without them. No place can be destitute of birds, therefore, all who desire it, may have the opportunity of studying these fascinating creatures. The joy one gets from the study is indeed unending.

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